

# Klan Once Flourished

(Mr. Hornaday was chief of The News' Washington Bureau until his retirement in 1960).

By WALTER C. HORNADAY

The Ku Klux Klan is not what it used to be—at least not in Texas.

In the early 1920's, Texans joined the Ku Klux Klan by the thousands.

Some 800 robed, hooded and masked Klansmen paraded through darkened streets in downtown Dallas. Similar parades were held in many other cities and towns.

On one single night in October, 1921, The Dallas News reported Klan marches through the streets of Ennis, Bryan, Mineola and Nacogdoches while citizens, mostly sympathizers, lined the streets to watch the spectacles.

The Klan's public display of power was only surface evidence of its influence those days. The Knights of the Invisible Empire formed a feared organization which threatened to take over the state's political authority as well as being a menace to law and order.

PRESENT DAY efforts to revive the Klan, feeble in comparison to operations around 45 years ago, appear doomed to failure. The hysteria that swept many states, north and south, in the post-World War I period hasn't broken out again.

Klan activities during its heyday, as recalled from personal experience and from reviewing newspaper stories of the time, make the record of its success seem today an unbelievable travesty on the common sense and decency of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who joined the order.

Take a look at one of the early day publicity blurbs, a folder that was circulated to recruit members.

On the front was a picture of a white robed, hooded and masked man holding aloft a flaming torch and riding a white-robed horse.

"The Ku Klux Klan. Yesterday, Today and Forever," proclaimed the document.

Below, by-lined by "William Joseph Simmons, Imperial Wizard" was a statement of the purposes and aims of the Klan.

SIMMONS EXPLAINED the Klan wasn't fighting the Roman Catholic Church as a religious institution, but opposed its attitude toward the public school system.

Jews, the imperial wizard explained, weren't eligible because they would be uncomfortable in the Klan. The order believed in Jesus Christ's teachings, Simmons stated, and at every Klan meeting a Jew would find himself out of harmony with his religious convictions.

As to the Negro, Simmons said the Klan was not an enemy of this racial group, but opposed organizations preaching and teaching social equality. The white supremacy creed of the Klan was stated by Simmons in these words:

"We hold it is obligatory upon the Negro race and upon all other colored races in America to recognize that they are living in the land of the white race and by courtesy of the white race and that the white race cannot be expected to surrender to any other race, either in whole or in part the control of its vital and fundamental governmental affairs."

APPLICATIONS for "citizenship" in the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, were addressed to:

"His Majesty, the imperial wizard, emperor of the invisible empire of the Ku Klux Klan."

There was no initiation fee as such, but applicants were required to accompany the request for "citizenship" with a "klectikon" or donation of \$10. Regional organizers called Kleagles took \$4 of this amount, the remainder apparently going to the imperial palace in Atlanta, Ga. Klansmen also were able to purchase robes for \$6.50.

This Klan, claiming to be the "original, genuine" KKK organized in 1866 in the South following the Civil War, was formed in Georgia around 1915. Prior to 1920 the membership reportedly did not exceed 5,000. Imperial Wizard Simmons declared

its rolls were not more than 90,000 in late 1921, but other sources placed the membership from 500,000 to 650,000.

C. Anderson Wright of New York, a former chief of staff of the Klan, said at an early congressional committee hearing on a resolution to investigate the Klan:

"Practically all the smaller cities of Texas are absolutely controlled by the Klan from mayor on down."

WRIGHT ASSERTED that Texas instead of Georgia should be headquarters for the KKK "because in Georgia they all look upon it more as a joke."

But the Klan was no joke in Texas.

In his testimony before the congressional committee, ex-Klansman Wright told of the parade in Dallas he said was arranged by city authorities, reporting that about the time the marchers in full regalia appeared the street lights were all extinguished.

The writer watched this parade down Elm Street, impressive on the shadowy streets. The eerie solemnity was broken occasionally when a sidewalk watcher would recognize a marcher.

"I know you Charley Brown by those yellow shoes on your big feet, one man called out.

The marching Klansman turned his head and waved.

THE DALLAS NEWS, which denounced the Klan movement as un-American, had this comment on the march:

"The spectacle of 800 masked and white gowned men parading the streets of Dallas under banners proclaiming them Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and self-appointed guardians of the community's political, social and moral welfare has its ridiculous aspects . . . But it also has a serious significance which will not be lost on the minds of men who cherish the community's good name and have the intelligence to understand how well designed that exhibition was to bring it under reproach.

"It was a slander on Dallas because only the conditions which could be given to

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Some are peace officers, wearing a function I can."

"But, in practice, it doesn't hold true."

# in Many Texas Cities

excuse the organization do not exist . . . White supremacy is not imperiled. Vice is not rampant. The constituted agencies of government are still regnant and if freedom is endangered, it is by the redivivus of the mob spirit in the disguising garb of the Ku Klux Klan."

The News waged war on the Klan for three years, finally winning the battle.

Sam H. Acheson wrote in "35,000 Days in Texas," a history of The News, published in 1938:

"The Klan quickly rose to almost complete power in city and county governments. Only the city public school system withstood the shock of the assault."

**IN ITS RAPID** growth in Dallas and other parts of Texas, many substantial businessmen joined the Klan. The order took upon itself to become a social censor of personal conduct. Some unsavory characters undoubtedly became members hoping to find haven.

At one meeting of the Dallas Klavern, members would arise and say they knew a man who was running around with another man's wife; that another acquaintance was not doing right and should be taken care of.

"Give his name to the kligrapp (secretary)," the cyclops would say.

Texas had its share of Klan beatings and other outrages, most of them in the name of morality.

When the Klan began seeking members in Dallas, a professional organizer appeared. After the Klan had dwindled away, he became a deputy in the Dallas County tax collector-assessor office.

**THE FIRST** Klan whipping in Dallas was planned as a publicity stunt, to draw attention to the organization and to bring in members. Selected newspaper reporters were told to be on a downtown corner one night if they wanted a story.

A Negro bellboy, on the excuse he was pandering for white women, was removed from the hotel, taken into the country, whipped, branded with KKK on his forehead, taken back to town and released.

Curiosity, a desire to find what the Klan was all about, attracted some persons, including employes of newspapers. As its political power became more evident, others became members to foster their office-holding ambitions.

**IN THE FALL** of 1921, New York World investigating reporters prepared a series exposing the Klan. The Dallas News carried the articles. In October of that year, the Texas Chamber of Commerce condemned the KKK with only four dissenting votes. A Fort Worth man opposed, saying that some of the very best men of his city were members and that the Klan existed because there had not been proper enforcement of law.

A widespread impression was created in Texas that the Klan was tied in with the Masonic order, some even believing it was Masonic-sponsored or, at least, tolerated. The situation caused Andrew L. Randell, grand master of Texas Masons, to issue a statement in mid-October, 1921, repudiating the Klan as having any Masonic connection.

The New York World exposure led to the congressional committee hearing. Here Imperial Wizard Simmons described the order as a moral teaching fraternity whose purpose was evangelical.

The Klan seemed to thrive on the uproar of opposition from many quarters. Its political authority in particular gained immensely.

Late in 1921, the word went out that the late Earle B. Mayfield of Tyler was the Klan-supported candidate for United States senator. A meeting of the Dallas membership was held at Kirkland Park, an inter-urban stop near Richardson on the Dallas-Denison line, at which Mayfield's name was given as the candidate all good Klansmen should support.

The Klan's influence in Texas reached its peak in the United States Senate race culminating in Mayfield's election. Former Gov. James E. Ferguson, barred from holding state office, took to the stump against Mayfield. Mayfield didn't reject Klan sup-

port, while Ferguson bitterly, attacked Ku Kluxism.

After Mayfield won the Democratic nomination over Ferguson, there was fear among Democratic leaders he would be beaten in the general election. Mayfield declined to resign the nomination. There was a court fight to keep Mayfield's name off the ballot, as well as the name of the late George E. B. Peddy, Houston attorney, who entered as an independent. During the court fight Mayfield admitted former Klan membership.

Flushed with its United States Senate victory, Klan leaders moved to take over the state government. In the 1924 Democratic primary Dallas Dist. Judge Felix D. Robertson entered the race as the Klan-backed candidate for governor. Jim Ferguson got into the political fray again by running his wife, Miriam A. Ferguson. Robertson led a field of nine in the first primary, with Mrs. Ferguson second. In the run-off, Texas' first woman governor won by almost 100,000 votes.

**TEXAS REPUBLICANS**, seeing a chance for an upset, induced Dr. George C. Butte, a highly respected professor of law at the University of Texas, to be the GOP candidate for governor.

The Dallas News had opposed Ferguson in the past. But it had also bitterly fought the Klan, losing thousands of subscribers because of its stand.

The News decided that the invisible empire of the Klan was more of a threat to good government than the Fergusons and endorsed Mrs. Ferguson. Dr. Butte received a big vote, the largest ever at that time for a Republican candidate for governor, but Mrs. Ferguson won, 422,558 to 294,970.

A leading figure in the growth of the Klan in Dallas and Texas was Dr. Hiram W. Evans, an upstairs dentist with offices on Main Street. He succeeded William Simmons as imperial wizard in 1922, moving to Atlanta, Ga. Evans continued as the top Klansman until 1939.

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